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AUTHOR	Mathieu, G. Bording
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ABSTRACT

Teachers are urged to improve their teaching through the effective use of pattern drills by examining the construction and function of the drills. Forty-eight questions with answers elaborate upon generalities and technicalities of drill design and their classroom use. (RL)

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TEACHING PROCEDURES FOR PATTERN PRACTICE: A SELF-TEST

G. Bording Mathieu

Pattern drills have become an accepted vehicle for teaching the grammar of modern languages and are found in every recent textbook where they often constitute the main part of the exercises. Their aim is to develop through intensive, guided practice the unconscious use of correct forms perceived consciously. Today pattern drills have achieved a high level of sophistication, and since teachers come in contact with them primarily in "ready-to-use" form in texts and tapes, little remains to be done in the way of helping teachers to learn how to construct their own, "homemade" drills. A great deal, however, still needs to be done in developing the art and science of teaching pattern drills and in making teachers aware of the crucial importance of using effective procedures in guiding a class through pattern practice. The best designed pattern drill will become a total failure as a teaching instrument if the teacher does not use it properly, in fact, the improper use of pattern drills may do great harm to students by leading them to conclude that language learning is boring, rote, and moronic.

The following Self-Test is intended to help you discover how much you know about the classroom use of pattern drills. If you know other ways of making their use even more effective, do inform the profession of it. In order to profit most from the Self-Test, the reader should take a piece of paper and cover up the answers. Each answer is followed by an attempt to explain why the answer seems to be the best one.

Suppose you were teaching the following pattern drill. In a text it would probably look like this:

Mein Onkel hat eine Drogerie.	Das ist die Drogerie meines Onkels.
Sein Vater hat einen Mercedes.	Das ist der Mercedes seines Vaters.
Unser Hausmädchen hat einen Freund.	Das ist der Freund unseres Hausmädchens.
Mein Lehrer hat eine Tochter.	Das ist die Tochter meines Lehrers.

If a stranger from Mars were to drop in on a class while the teacher is engaging the students in the above pattern practice, he might hear what would seem to him a mumbo jumbo of unnecessarily involved and incomprehensible language activity which might go like this (except for the letters we have added to identify each frame):

A Mein Onkel hat eine Drogerie
B Mein Onkel hat eine Drogerie
C Das ist die Drogerie meines Onkels
D Das ist die Drogerie meines Onkels
E Mein Onkel hat eine Drogerie
F Das ist die Drogerie meines Onkels
G Das ist die Drogerie meines Onkels
H Das ist die Drogerie meines Onkels

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I Sein Vater hat einen Mercedes
J Sein Vater hat einen Mercedes
K Das ist der Mercedes seines Vaters
L Das ist der Mercedes seines Vaters
M Sein Vater hat einen Mercedes
N Das ist der Mercedes seines Vaters
O Das ist der Mercedes seines Vaters
P Das ist der Mercedes seines Vaters

Q Mein Onkel hat eine Drogerie
R Das ist die Drogerie meines Onkels
S Das ist die Drogerie meines Onkels
T Das ist die Drogerie meines Onkels

U Unser Hausmädchen hat einen Freund
V Unser Hausmädchen hat einen Freund
W Unser Hausmädchen hat einen Freund
X Das ist der Freund unseres Hausmädchens
Y Das ist der Freund unseres Hausmädchens
Z Das ist der Freund unseres Hausmädchens

AA Mein Onkel hat eine Drogerie
BB Das ist die Drogerie meines Onkels
CC Das ist die Drogerie meines Onkels
DD Sein Vater hat einen Mercedes
EE Das ist der Mercedes seines Vaters
FF Das ist der Mercedes seines Vaters
GG Unser Hausmädchen hat einen Freund
HH Das ist der Freund unseres Hausmädchens
II Das ist der Freund unseres Hausmädchens

Our stranger from Mars would undoubtedly be completely lost in this rapid give-and-take. The German teacher of the year 1968 could, however, easily discern method in this madness because he could formulate and answer questions like these:

1. *What kind of a drill is this?*

A Transformation Drill because the stimulus consists of a grammatically complete utterance. In a Substitution or Completion Drill, for example, the stimulus is only part of an utterance. The various types of drills are best classified not by their grammatical objective but by the nature of their stimulus.

2. *What is the grammatical objective of this drill?*

To attain mastery of the correct genitive masculine and neuter singular forms of nouns.

3. *Is this a Mimicry or Mutation Drill?*

A Mutation Drill, because the learner is not merely practicing the forms through imitation but by having to "mutate," i.e., change the form in his response.

4. *Does the student have to make more than one change in each frame?*

Yes. The new point of grammar practiced is the change of the form of the noun. In addition, the student has to change previously learned

elements: the form of the possessive adjective (*mein* > *meines, unser* > *unseres,* etc.), and the indefinite to the definite article (*eine* > *die, einen* > *der,* etc.). Besides these three changes, the drill contains a mimicry element that represents a change from the stimulus but which the student does not have to make: *das ist.*

5. *What should a teacher determine about a drill before using it?*

a) What type of drill it is: Transformation, Substitution, Progressive Substitution, Replacement, Completion, Question-Answer, Expansion, Contraction, Free Replacement, or Translation? b) Is it a Mimicry or Mutation Drill, i.e., does the student imitate or initiate a change in forms? c) Is it a Mono- or Multi-Structural Drill, i.e., does the student have to make only one or several changes? d) What is the grammatical objective of the drill? The answers to these questions will determine the complexity of the procedures that the teacher will have to use in pattern practice. In a Mimicry Drill, for example, the teacher needs to engage in much less "retracing" or "feedback" (see below).

6. *Who says A?*

The teacher. He models the stimulus so that all students can hear it well for imitation.

7. *Does the teacher use kinesics (body-German) with A?*

Yes, if such a movement (shrug of shoulder, waving of hand, lifting of eyebrow) would be natural to a live speech situation.

8. *When does the teacher signal to the students to imitate?*

Immediately after he has modeled *A*. While he models it, his hands should be free for kinesics, if needed.

9. *What kind of gesture would he use as signal for imitation?*

The signal for Group Echo: with both hands extended, palms facing him, the teacher signals with beckoning hands to imitate what he has said.

10. *What is B?*

The Group Echo: the entire class imitates in chorus what the teacher said.

11. *What is C?*

The correct response. The teacher models it several times and signals for several Group Echoes because it contains the new forms to be learned.

12. *What signal should be used with C?*

The same as with *A*.

13. *What is D?*

The Group Echo.

14. *What kind of practice are A through D?*

Listen and Echo Practice, the necessary steps of imitation in order to familiarize the student with the new forms, sounds, and pattern before he can be challenged to "do it on his own".

15. *What begins with E?*

The Stimulus-Initiate phase in which the student must react creatively by forming the new pattern on his own.

16. *What gesture would the teacher use with E?*

The signal for Group Stimulus: with both hands pointing toward the class, index fingers extended, the teacher signals for the entire class to initiate the new pattern.

17. *What is F?*

The attempted correct response by the entire group.

18. *What is G?*

The feedback of the correct response by the teacher. Immediately after the group has responded with *F*, the teacher models the correct response and signals for Group Echo.

19. *What is H?*

The Group Echo: the entire class imitates the correct response.

20. *Is there need to check whether the students know what they are saying?*

Yes, although in a good text a drill should never introduce new words but only re-circulate already learned vocabulary. Theoretically there should be no need to check out the meaning. Since we do, however, want to verify that the students know what they are saying, it would be good procedure if the teacher asked after *A* or *F* "Was bedeutet das?", and called on a student to give the meaning in English, thus helping the rest of the class to check their own understanding of the utterance.

21. *Should the students know the grammatical objective of the drill?*

Yes. Mere habit-forming exercises for persons engaged in a deliberate, conscious language learning process are not as effective as those that combine the cognitive with the habit-forming procedures. Although the formal grammar of the genitive of nouns is explained in rules and paradigms in the text, the teacher should make sure that all students are aware of the grammatical aim of the pattern practice. This can be accomplished by a statement immediately after *D*, before the Stimulus-Initiate phase sets in.

22. *Is the following an appropriate statement for informing the learner about the grammatical point of the drill?*

"Ich sage jetzt in einer nicht-genitivischen Konstruktion, daß jemand etwas hat, und Sie wandeln meine Aussage um, indem Sie den Genitiv des Possessivpronomens und des Hauptwortes gebrauchen. Fangen Sie immer mit 'Das ist' an."

No. The principal pedagogical failure of this example lies in the discrepancy between the unrestricted FL use by the teacher and the learner's low language competence on the beginner's level where such simple drills are used. The instructions are much too difficult on three counts: 1) vocabulary, 2) structure, 3) complexity (of abstract terms). Instructions, no matter whether given in English or in German, must be simple, brief and clear. We recommend this simple version as a possible alternative: "Wir üben jetzt den Genitiv. Ich gebe Ihnen Sätze *ohne* den Genitiv, und Sie gebrauchen eine Genitivkonstruktion. Beispiel. . . ." A brief discussion of the grammatical changes that take place may or may not follow the drill.

23. *Should the teacher give the instructions in German and English?*

Yes, but the teacher should "wean" the students from English as soon as possible. He gives the instructions first in German, then in English. Gradually, as the students' understanding of German progresses, the English should be discarded.

24. *Should the students, as a group or individuals, use gestures?*

Yes, whenever appropriate. In the pattern drill used as illustration, the students should point to an imaginary uncle, car, friend. With younger learners, the teacher might draw stickfigures on the blackboard.

25. *What happens in steps I through P?*

A new frame is introduced and the teacher follows the same steps as in *A* through *H*. Teacher models *I*, signals for Group Echo. Class gives echo *J*. Teacher models *K*, signals for Group Echo. Class gives echo *L*. Teacher gives stimulus *M*, signals for Group Stimulus, class responds with *N*. Teacher feeds back correct response *O*, calls for Group Echo. Class gives echo *P*.

26. *Are all these steps really necessary?*

Pattern practice is based on the theory of step-increment learning through the sequential, cumulative and carefully recycled development of language skills, each step building deliberately on the preceding steps. The teacher will have to decide whether any shortcuts he may wish to take will help or hamper learning. The procedures offered here are maximum steps which the teacher should have at his command to use whenever necessary; at times a reduction in the steps will be useful, but the teacher should never go below the minimum steps of the machine-presented practice: modeling, stimulus, pause for attempted correct response, feedback of correct response, pause for echoing response.

27. *What shortcuts might be used here?*

Instead of going through the modeling and listen-imitate phase *K–L*, he could go directly to *M–P*, the listen-and-initiate or creative phase. This would not be a short cut; rather, the group would discover the new pattern by transferring the characteristic of the previous one. If, how-

ever, more than 30% of the group make a mistake or fail to respond, the teacher should realize that he has been pacing his class too rapidly.

28. *What phase is Q through S?*

The retracing phase. Before presenting a new frame, the teacher goes back to the previously practiced frame(s) to insure that everyone is given a chance to learn.

29. *What is different about the retracing phase?*

The teacher now calls on the *individual* to initiate. In the group response the teacher can never really be sure whether every student is able to perform on his own or whether he is merely mumbling along with the group. Calling on the individual permits a better evaluation of how well learning is progressing and it also creates motivation.

30. *How can the teacher insure that all students participate when he calls on individuals?*

By the technique of scanning. Immediately after giving the stimulus *Q*, the teacher scans with his pointed index the entire class from right to left and left to right for several seconds, thus inducing every student to silent formulation of the response, poised on his lips, ready to give it if signaled to. At times he may even signal to a student for response while looking in another direction.

31. *Should the teacher call on students by name in pattern practice?*

No, no more than an orchestra conductor would cue in his players by calling their names. The student must be kept on the *qui vive* and not be permitted to let his mind wander. His eyes must be riveted on the teacher, ready for instant response. The use of names, moreover, interferes disturbingly between the rapid-fire lines of the teacher.

32. *What gesture would the teacher use with Q?*

The same as with *E* or *M*, except that the teacher now signals for an individual response and therefore uses only one hand.

33. *What gesture would the teacher use with S?*

The same as with *G* or *O*, the signal for Group Echo. In the retracing phase the stimulus is directed to an individual, but the echoing of the correct response is by the entire group.

34. *Is it necessary to have the group echo the correct response every time?*

No. If the student who was challenged as an individual has responded correctly in form and pronunciation and the teacher has evidence that the group is getting enough practice, the Group Echo can be left out and the drill paced still more rapidly.

35. *Could there be a situation where the individual student has responded correctly and there might still be need for calling for a Group Echo?*

Yes. Whenever a student speaks too softly and cannot be heard by the entire class. Students often lose interest in the class activity simply because they cannot hear what goes on.

36. *Would the teacher feed back the response even if the student said and pronounced it correctly?*

Yes—the feedback serves not only to correct if the response was wrong, but confirm it, if it was right. The student thus becomes his own judge, involving him further in intensive listening as he compares his utterance to that of the teacher. Since the teacher no longer says "richtig" or "falsch," the student relies on the feedback.

37. *What happens in U through Z?*

The teacher introduces a new frame, same steps as *A* to *H* or *I* to *P*.

38. *What is AA through II?*

Retracing of three previously learned frames.

39. *In HH, does the group or an individual respond?*

An individual.

40. *In AA, does the teacher signal with one or both hands?*

With only one, for individual response.

41. *And in CC, FF, II?*

This is the feedback of the correct response. The teacher may not signal for an echo at all, or he may signal for a Group Echo with both hands.

42. *Is it necessary to retrace back to the first frame every time?*

No. Here again the teacher will have to decide which frames need the most practice. He can select those frames that are the most troublesome.

43. *How can the teacher know whether he is pacing the group properly?*

By calling not only on the better students, but also on those who are not among the fastest learners. Even the slower learners will be able to imitate the new forms after getting the intensive imitation practice as members of the group. If the teacher calls only on those from whom he can expect a correct response, he will be deluding himself.

44. *How can the teacher insure that he will not lose the fast learners by pacing the group to the rate of the slower learners?*

He should devise means of challenging the better students as individuals. For example, he can have a good student stand next to him to feedback the correct response; or he can form a Student—Teacher Team, in which the student takes over the pattern practice after having observed the teacher for the first several frames. The teacher enters only to feedback the correct response or to correct mistakes.

45. *What other means can be used to keep up the interest of the group during pattern practice?*

The teacher should end every drill by challenging the students to make up frames with their own vocabulary but on exactly the same grammatical pattern being learned.

46. *Was this drill done books open or closed?*

Books closed, lest we give the eye more practice than the tongue. Or as Mark Twain put it: "They spell it *Straße* and pronounce it *Shtraße;* foreigners always spell better than they pronounce."

47. *Would there be any written follow-up of this drill?*

Preferably yes. The written work in form of a home assignment would follow the same principles of stimulus-response, immediate confirmation or correction. The student would cover up the right hand column, and as he wrote each frame, uncover the correct response and immediately make all corrections necessary. Thus reading and writing activities reinforce oral mastery in proper sequence.

48. *Can language learners really be induced to like pattern practice?*

It's up to the teacher.

California State College at Fullerton

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